



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE HEAVY HELICOPTER SQUADRON 463
MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP 24
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
1650
CO
10 Dec 09

From: Commanding Officer, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463
To: Commandant of the Marine Corps (ASM)
Via: (1) Commanding Officer, Marine Aircraft Group 24
(2) Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

Subj: NOMINATION OF MARINE HEAVY HELICOPTER SQUADRON 463 FOR THE
MARINE CORPS AVIATION ASSOCIATION'S KEITH B. MCCUTCHEON AWARD

Ref: (a) MCO 1650.29G

Encl: (1) Description of Action
(2) Unit History
(3) Proposed Citation
(4) Photographs
(5) Statistical Summary

1. Per the reference, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 is enthusiastically nominated for the Marine Corps Aviation Association's prestigious Keith B. McCutcheon Award. The enclosures are submitted as supporting documentation.

2. As the oldest CH-53, Heavy Lift squadron in the Corps, HMH-463 has added one of its finest chapters in 44 years of superb service. During the award period, HMH-463 exemplified the very best of every aspect in Marine Aviation through unselfish, critical efforts to achieve timely upgrades to engines or aircraft survivability equipment, through foresight and initiative in training, through combat readiness as they engaged the enemy on day 1 of combat responsibilities in Helmand Province, through the sustained aircraft readiness that achieved the most combat flight hours of any previous HMH in the previous eight years of war in Afghanistan. Whether supporting Ground Combat Forces in training within the United States, inserting and resupplying forces under fire, or landing in contested areas to solemnly retrieve fallen Warriors, Pegasus Marines and Sailors exemplify the best of Heavy Lift; "Mission first, Marines always". HMH-463 has earned the distinction as 2009 Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron of the Year.

3. Point of contact at this command is Major [REDACTED] at DSN [REDACTED] or commercial [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]
C. C. ABRAMS

Description of Action

2009 was arguably the finest chapter in the long illustrious legacy of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 (HMH-463), having successfully flown more combat flight hours, completed more Assault Support Requests (ASR) in support of the Infantry than any other HMH in the entire 8 years of war in Afghanistan. The young warriors of Pegasus took a 40 year old aircraft to battle and became the squadron of choice for assault support throughout Helmand Province. Professionalism and tenacity was apparent throughout the past year as HMH-463 accomplished many firsts, carrying on the legacy and great reputation of the "Mad Bombers" of Vietnam. Safely operating the CH-53D at the limits of its capabilities from general support to direct action, improved landing strips to desert spots while taking fire, mission success was due to phenomenal maintainers solving countless problems, and courageous aircrew committed to supporting their fellow Marine.

2009 dawned with an uncertain future for HMH-463. The Marine Corps was shifting focus from OIF to OEF and the force structure that would be committed to renewed kinetic operations in Regional Command South (RC-South) Afghanistan was yet to be decided. Displaying an adroit understanding of the challenges ahead, HMH-463 was the first squadron in MAG-24 to develop a comprehensive training plan with the specific intent of supporting OEF mission sets. Major evolutions followed in quick succession including a deployment for training (DFT) to Puhakuloa Training Area (PTA) for high altitude Tactics Techniques and Procedures (TTP) validation, a DFT to Pacific Missile Range Facility (PRMF) for surface-to-air simulator supported ground threat reaction training, support to Weapons and Tactics Instructor course 2-09, and the successful completion of Block IV pre-deployment training program (PTP) certification during an Alternate Training Venue (ATV) at Yuma AZ. Throughout the PTP, Pegasus insightfully used a progressive and innovative simulator syllabus to reinforce high-hot-heavy skill sets that were later emulated by all MAG-24 units. Always fostering a "can-do" attitude and, looking to improve Marine Aviation Warfighting capabilities, HMH-463 worked tirelessly with U.S. Army technical representatives to incorporate for the first time in 1st MAW operations outside of OIF, the Blue Force Tracker (BFT) and Tactical Operational Console (TOC) capability at the squadron level. Pegasus once again, demonstrated their ability to balance both the necessity to attain full proficiency in core skills while going above and beyond to progress Marine Corps Expeditionary and Distributed operational concepts in tactical level, squadron Combat Operations Center (COC) capacity.

The detailed and aggressive operational vision of the Pegasus PTP resulted in the accomplishment of over 950 initial and refresher Training and Readiness (T&R) codes and ultimately qualifying 11 full combat Night Systems Qualified Low Light Level (LLL) crews including the tail gunner position to deploy to combat operations in OEF. This is an accomplishment that surpassed all other MAG-24 squadrons and proved to be a standard not met by any other HMH or VMM in support of OEF, thus providing MAG-40 with unmatched assault support flexibility.

In the midst of a demanding yet very successful PTP that foreshadowed Pegasus combat deployment to Afghanistan, Pegasus Marines successfully completed 3 major maintenance inspections in a blistering 5

Description of Action

month period, culminating with the Chief of Naval Air Forces (CNAF) in-depth assessment prior to deployment. Expertly managed and intertwined into our preparations were further inspections from a Marine Corps Administrative Team (MCAAT), a Staff Assistance Visit (SAV) and a Naval Safety Center Climate Assessment. All inspections were completed with noteworthy results, with many programs identified by inspecting officials as "Fleet examples" and comments such as "near perfect command climate". Unwavering professionalism and focus allowed HMH-463 to balance intense operational training with multiple maintenance inspections in a very short period, illustrating the breadth of leadership and professionalism at all levels. Despite the operational tempo at home base, HMH-463 was specifically selected to provide pivotal support to the progression of the CH-53D and Marine Corps assault support aviation. Pegasus deployed a detachment of our most qualified Marines to assist Engineers at Patuxent River, MD to complete the test and evaluation of the GE-416 engine and furthering the testing of the improved rotor blade (IRB) on the CH-53D that Pegasus had begun at the end of the previous year. The tireless and professional efforts of Pegasus Marines resulted in the rapid certification and approval of the GE-416 installment on the CH-53D, proving to be mission essential for operations in OEF as HMH-362 received authorization within days of their transition to Afghanistan.

Pegasus Marines' efforts were consistently focused on preparation for combat operations, and in July the Warriors arrived in Afghanistan ready to fight. Pegasus' combat readiness was put to the test on the very same day the squadron completed its Transfer of Authority (TOA) as they planned-led-executed a 12 aircraft mission (CH-53D, CH-53E, and Attack helicopters, KC-130, AV-8B and UAS) in a nighttime Low Light Level (LLL) raid into the Dehaneh Pass of Now Zad District Southern Helmand Province. The bravery, tactical skill, and audacity of Pegasus crews resulted in the successful insertion of Marine and Afghan forces into multiple, unprepared, desert landing zones while under heavy enemy fire, and taking their first battle damage as they suppressed enemy forces with the tail mounted GAU-21 during egress. This raid was the first of 9 named operations for which Pegasus was chosen as Air Mission Commander (AMC), flight leads or lead planners, the most of any assault support squadron in MAG 40 to date. The squadron was so successful in their tactical execution that MAG-40 and 2nd MEB specifically selected Pegasus to support Other Governmental Agencies (OGA), Marine Special Operations Teams (MSOT) and on a larger scale, a 300-soldier direct action raid conducted by the "Black Watch" Battalion from Scotland of Royal Reserve Group South (RBG-S). Each mission, Pegasus flight leaders expertly integrated 5 of the 6 functions of Marine Corps Aviation to include Joint Aviation assets when required, while landing their aircraft in powder-dust brownout zones on NVD's under enemy opposition. The skill and professionalism of Pegasus crews made these very complicated missions, that compete with the most difficult the Marine Corps has ever executed in combat, seem routine. Pegasus Marines applied the same intense effort and placed the same attention to detail on daily General Support missions or numerous Immediate requests such as vehicle parts to a convoy hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), successfully accomplishing over 3,850 Assault Support Requests (ASR), which is the most of any previous HMH in eight years of war in Afghanistan.

Description of Action

The combat spirit throughout HMH-463 ranks was not exclusive of daily sorties. Pegasus had the highest number of female Marines of any squadron that graduated and participated in the 2nd MEB Female Engagement Team (FET) program. The warrior female Marines of Pegasus, at a moment's notice prepared to leave their toolboxes and desks, don their body armor, and accompanied Infantry Marines as they engaged the Afghan population; Pegasus Marines bravely participating at the very heart of the Counter Insurgency (COIN) fight.

The austere environment, extreme temperatures and relative infancy of major Marine Corps Aviation operations at Camp Bastion Airfield made it extremely challenging to maintain aircraft ready to support the Infantry. The average utilization rate per airframe went from 15.4 hours in Hawaii to 68.7 hours per month in Afghanistan requiring the completion of 19 Phase inspections in only a 5 month period. Working around the clock and having only four dedicated maintenance days in five months of combat operations, Pegasus accomplished readiness rates of 82.9% Mission Capable, and 80.5% Full Mission Capable, completing nearly 50,000 Maintenance man hours. All Pegasus missions and maintenance were completed without sacrificing Safety, evidenced by the nomination from MAG-40 and 2nd MEB for HMH-463 to receive the Marine Corps Achievement in Safety Award for 2009. Further evidence of the superb reputation of Pegasus, the squadron was entrusted with conducting the first integrated missions with the newly arrived UH-1Y as well as providing the first MV-22 pilots of VMM-261 and aircrew from HMH-462 with tactical briefing templates and area familiarization flights before they were able to take their first combat tasking. Additionally, in the midst of combat operations while expertly managing the highest utilization rates in years, Pegasus was the first CH-53 squadron to install and employ the Dual ALE bucket and AAR-47(B)V2 configuration, accomplishing it all without compromising their consistent support to the infantry.

The following statistics summarize the quantitative achievements of HMH-463 during the deployment to Afghanistan, which out-paced all previous CH-53D/E squadrons in eight years of combat operations in OEF:

OEF Totals (11 August 2009 - 31 December 2009)

Total OEF hours: 3,150.8

Total OEF day hours: 1,304.9

Total OEF night hours: 1,845.9

Total OEF sorties: 3,400

Total passengers carried: 14,034

Total cargo carried (LBS): 1,481,692

In conclusion, HMH-463 has not only participated in the historical events of 2nd MEB actions in the Helmand Province, they have set the standard extremely high for those that follow. In November, an Infantry Company Commander from Fox 2/2 addressed the Marines of Pegasus in a letter after a CH-53D landed in a "hot" LZ while a fire-fight ensued recovering a Marine KIA, he wrote: "Words cannot describe the emotions and sense of gratitude that our whole TEAM has for what you did. I will never forget - you are Fightin' Foxes Heroes". Assault Support exists to support the infantry. In Helmand Province Afghanistan, the infantry did not just request assault support; they requested the Warriors of Pegasus.

2009 Keith B. McCutcheon Award
HMH-463 Unit History

On 1 March 2009, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 463 "Pegasus" celebrated 43 years of providing heavy lift helicopter assault support for Fleet Marine Forces. HMH-463 is currently assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 24, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. The squadron has a very long and diverse history spanning nearly 6 decades. Originally, a fixed wing bombing squadron designated VMB-463 during World War II, HMH-463 has operated from both coasts of the United States and Hawaii, and served in nine Marine Aircraft Groups and three Marine Aircraft Wings. The squadron has been deactivated on three separate occasions and was most recently activated on 1 March 1966, as Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 and has been in continuous operation ever since.

The Marine Corps, in a search for a new heavy lift helicopter, placed its initial order for the CH-53A Sea Stallion in August 1962. At that time, it was the largest helicopter design available to the U.S. Navy. On 1 March 1966 at Santa Ana, California, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 was born. With a gross weight of 42,000lbs, the CH-53A was the largest of all Sikorsky helicopters at the time of development with an enormous load carrying capacity.

Today, the squadron flies the CH-53D Sea Stallion which has upgraded engines over the CH-53A. Although newer than the "A" model, most of the squadron's aircraft were manufactured in 1969. Little has changed over the years with this aircraft; nevertheless, the Sea Stallion still remains a viable platform to provide assault support to the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) and will continue to do well into the future when it is expected to be replaced by the MV-22 Osprey and the CH-53K.

In 1966, HMH-463 deployed to Marble Mountain, Republic of Vietnam, where it participated in the Vietnam War for four consecutive years. The squadron returned to Vietnam in 1973 to participate in operation End Sweep, the minesweeping operations of Haiphong and Hon Gai, in North Vietnam. In 1975, Pegasus returned to Southeast Asia to participate in operations Eagle Pull and Frequent Wind, the evacuations of Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Saigon, Republic of Vietnam.

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HMH-463 Unit History

The squadron's efforts in Southeast Asia earned HMH-463 a Presidential Unit Citation Streamer, a Navy Unit Commendation Streamer with two Bronze Stars, a Meritorious Unit Commendation Streamer with one Silver Star, a Vietnam Service Streamer with two Silver Stars and one Bronze Star, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with a Palm Streamer, and a Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation Civil Actions Streamer.

In August of 1990, HMH-463 returned to combat when they deployed to Saudi Arabia to take part in Operation Desert Shield. The squadron remained in the Persian Gulf to participate in Operation Desert Storm before returning to Kaneohe Bay in March 1991.

In the years following, "Pegasus" participated in a variety of missions around the Pacific. In September of 1992, after Hurricane Iniki struck the island of Kauai, Hawaii, HMH-463 delivered relief during Operation Garden Isle. Since then, HMH-463 has twice participated in Joint Task Force-Full Accounting in Cambodia, most recently in February 1995. Following that operation, the squadron remained in Asia to participate in exercise Cobra Gold, Thailand, which continued through April 1995. In November of 1996, HMH-463 deployed four CH-53Ds to Cairns, Australia, in support of the President of the United States. In April 1997, HMH-463 completed a three month deployment aboard the USS New Orleans to participate in Exercise Tandem Thrust 97, the largest Joint/Combined Exercise held in Australia since World War II. From October 2002 to March 2003, and again from March to December 2004 the squadron participated in the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) to the Western Pacific in support of III Marine Expeditionary Forces (III MEF). During these deployments the Marines of Pegasus participated in numerous exercises on mainland Japan, Republic of South Korea, Republic of the Philippines, and Thailand.

In March of 2006, HMH-463 returned to combat operations, deploying to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07 as the first CH-53D squadron in Iraq. For seven months, "Pegasus" conducted raids and flew assault support missions throughout the Al Anbar province, accumulating 3,989 flight hours, moving 24,940 troops and 2,325,219 pounds of cargo. Once again, HMH-463 set the standard for assault support operations in a combat theater having transported more troops and supplies than any other

2009 Keith B. McCutcheon Award
HMH-463 Unit History

unit since the start of combat operations. HMH-463 returned from Iraq in October 2006.

On 15 June 2008, Pegasus returned from a unit deployment to Okinawa, Japan, where they successfully reestablished the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) and provided a boost in the assault support capabilities of the Marine Corps in the Western Pacific Theater. While deployed, the squadron participated in Operations Freedom Banner and Foal Eagle 2008 in the Republic of South Korea. These bilateral exercises involved close integration with the Republic of Korea Marine Corps. Additionally the squadron conducted a Deployment for Training (DFT) at Yokota AFB and the Mt. Fuji training area on mainland Japan.

In July of 2009, Pegasus once again answered the nation's call to combat, deploying to Helmand Province Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom using the upgraded T64-GE-416 engines. On the first day of combat operations, HMH-463 planned and led Operation *Eastern Resolve II* under heavy enemy fire, inserting Marines who cut off a key enemy supply route. In addition to conducting day and night general assault support missions on a daily basis, under frequent enemy fire, the squadron participated in other deliberate operations such as *Operation Azadi Central*, *Operation Azadi North*, the continuation of *Operation Khanjar*, *Operation Red Thunder*, and *Operation Cobra's Anger*. These operations resulted in the first large scale presence of US Marines in the politically unstable Helmand River Valley. Despite operating in the high altitudes of the Hindu Kush mountain range and the harsh Margow Desert, HMH-463 showed the effectiveness and reliability of a 40 year old aircraft, flying more than 3000 combat hours, carrying more than 1.5 million pounds of cargo and 17,000 passengers, and established themselves as the most reliable and effective squadron in MAG-40.

From the jungles of Vietnam, to the waters of the Pacific, from the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan to the snow covered mountains of South Korea, Pegasus Marines have proven, and continue to prove, that the CH-53D is a force multiplier, providing heavy lift assault support to the Marine Air Ground Task Force for years to come.

PROPOSED CITATION

The Marine Corps Aviation Association takes great pleasure in presenting the 2009 Marine Corps Aviation Association Keith B. McCutcheon Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron of the Year Award to:

MARINE HEAVY HELICOPTER SQUADRON 463

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 sustained superior performance, meritorious service and professional achievement while conducting training and combat operations for the period 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009. Through unselfish and aggressive support to the Marine Corps assault support community, III MEF, and Combatant Commanders in Operation Enduring Freedom, Pegasus Marines of HMMH-463 successfully attacked the most difficult missions in an austere, demanding environment. Their determination and focus enabled the fielding of critical engine upgrades, enhanced threat detection and defensive capabilities, and improved tactical level Command and Control concepts. HMMH-463 immediately cemented their superb reputation in Afghanistan by executing a combat assault mission on the day of their Transfer of Authority. Pegasus was consistently selected to lead the most challenging operations with both 2nd MEB and Special Operations Forces. During this year, HMMH-463 safely flew 4170.8 hours, transported 17,248 passengers and moved 1,552,592 pounds of cargo surpassing any previous HMMH in total combat hours and Assault Support Requests completed in the entire eight years of war in Afghanistan. By their professionalism and unfailing devotion to duty, the Marines and Sailors of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

HMH of the Year
Photograph Captions

1. Unit point of contact for this award is Major [REDACTED], DSN: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@usmc.mil.
2. The following photos depict a variety of HMH-463 capabilities:
 - a. Pegasus "Greatest Generation" Keeping the Oldest Fleet in Marine Corps Inventory Flying and Fighting in Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - b. HMH-463 the First Heavy Lift Squadron with Operational Use of the Forward Firing Dual Dispensing Pods, Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - c. HMH-463 Providing Heavy Lift - Emergency Resupply Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - d. Pegasus Marines Providing Front Line Support "Any Clime and Place" Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - e. HMH-463 Supporting Heavy RIP for the Marines Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - f. A Pegasus tail gunner test fires a GAU-21 .50 caliber machine gun during a night mission over Helmand Province Afghanistan.
 - g. A CH-53D from HMH-463 lands at a combat outpost in the Helmand Province Afghanistan.

MCO 1650.29H

Dec 2009

ROTARY WING/TILTROTOR SQUADRON STATISTICAL SUMMARY

UNIT: HMH-463

AWARD: Keith B. McCutcheon HMH of the Year Award

SAFETY:	HAZARD REPORTS	<u>4 HazRep / 0 HMRs</u>
	PUBLISHED SAFETY ARTICLES	<u>1</u>
	NATOPS RECOMMENDATIONS	<u>1</u>
	CLASS "A" MISHAPS	<u>NONE</u>
	CLASS "B/C" MISHAPS	<u>NONE</u>
7 OCT 06	HOURS FLOWN SINCE LAST MAJOR ACCIDENT	<u>8,577.4</u>

FLIGHT DATA:	LAST YEAR	CURRENT YEAR
OPERATIONAL READINESS	<u>80.7%</u>	<u>87.4%</u>
FMC RATES	<u>74.2%</u>	<u>80.5%</u>
MC RATES	<u>77.7%</u>	<u>82.9%</u>
UTILIZATION RATES	<u>16.2%</u>	<u>39.1%</u>
TOTAL SORTIES	<u>1,707</u>	<u>4,247</u>
TOTAL HOURS	<u>2,061.0</u>	<u>4,170.8</u>
WEEKS DEPLOYED	<u>24</u>	<u>28</u>

PERSONNEL:		
FIRST TERM REENLISTMENTS		<u>10</u>
RETENTION RATES		<u>FTAP33.3%/STAP100%</u>
OFFICER AUGMENTATION	REQUESTED	<u>9</u>
	APPROVED	<u>9</u>
NON-EAS ATTRITION		<u>2</u>
OFF-DUTY EDUCATION (NUMBER ENROLLED)		<u>5</u>
GED'S COMPLETED		<u>0</u>
MCI/EXTENSION COURSES COMPLETED		<u>396</u>
MEDICAL/DENTAL READINESS		<u>100%/94%</u>

OPERATIONS:	CURRENT YEAR
CARGO DELIVERED (#LBS)	<u>1,552,592</u>
PASSENGERS TRANSPORTED	<u>17,248</u>

REMARKS:

Medical/Dental Readiness data reflects the date HMH-463 deployed and the current date.

CONTACT INFO

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